

'What Goes Up, Must Come Down'



City Councilwoman Toni Lawrence, center, and task force members Brenda Stardig-Patrick and Victor Alvarez want Spring Branch residents to know that firing guns into the air is illegal, even if it's to celebrate the New Year.

Crackdown targets skyward firing

Houston police, CrimeStoppers and Spring Branch leaders have joined together in an effort to discourage citizens from shooting guns into the air Friday night to celebrate the arrival of the New Year.

"What goes up, must come down," Hispanic community leader Victor Alvarez said during a news conference Tuesday outside the Houston Police Department's Long Point substation.

Firing a weapon into the air is against the law, said Lt. S.E. Phares of the Northwest Patrol Division, and for the past two years the Houston Police Department has had a No-Tolerance policy for celebratory gunfire.

Two years ago, two people were killed by celebratory gunfire on New Year's Eve, according to Texans Against Gun Violence.

Last year, four people were convicted of unlawful discharge of a weapon but no one was killed.

As a Class A misdemeanor, firing a

weapon as an act of celebration hasn't drawn much attention from CrimeStoppers but this year is different, said Crime-Stoppers Director Kim Ogg.

This year, Ogg said, the organization will offer rewards to people who help convict people who fire their weapons skyward without concern about where the lethal slugs might land.

Violators can get up to one year in jail and a \$4,000 fine, if convicted, Phares said.

"Some apartment managers say they are afraid to go outside on New Year's Eve."

- District A task force member Brenda Stardig-Patrick

Phares said there were more than 4,600 reports last year of gun fire on New Year's Eve. While it is hard to match reports of gunshots fired with gunshot injuries, he said some injuries were apparently from celebratory gunshots.

Phares urged people who hear gunfire to call the Police Department's non-emergency number.

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Guns

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Toni Lawrence, District A Houston City Council member, said celebratory gun fire was a problem throughout the city and praised the

Houston Police Northwest Patrol Division and Spring Branch civic organizations for taking leadership positions in combating the problem.

She said her District A task force members, Alvarez and Brenda Stardig-Patrick, had been particularly effective.

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Stardig-Patrick said the problem was especially severe in apartment complexes in Spring Branch.

"Some apartment managers say they are afraid to go outside on New Year's Eve," she said.